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OPIOIDS

New York Times: In cities where it once reigned, heroin is disappearing

Heroin has ravaged this city since the early 1960s, fueling desperation and crime that remain endemic in many neighborhoods. But lately, despite heroin's long, deep history here, users say it has become nearly impossible to find.

Heroin's presence is fading up and down the Eastern Seaboard, from New England mill towns to rural Appalachia, and in parts of the Midwest that were overwhelmed by it a few years back. It remains prevalent in many Western states, but even New York City, the nation's biggest distribution hub for the drug, has seen less of it this year.

The diminishing supply should be a victory for public health and law enforcement alike. Instead, in cities like Baltimore, longtime users who managed to survive decades injecting heroin are now at far higher risk of dying from an overdose. That is because synthetic fentanyl, a deadlier drug that is much cheaper to produce and distribute than heroin, has all but replaced it.

SEXUAL OFFENSES

Austin American-Statesman: 10 hours to solve a sex crime

Given their caseloads and a constant stream of new reports, Austin police sex crime detectives and supervisors say they are so overworked and time-strapped that they too often bounce from investigation to investigation, victim to victim, hoping for a speedy resolution in one case before jumping to the next.

The number of cases, measured against the number of detectives assigned to the unit, reveals a stark reality: According to an American-Statesman analysis, 13 investigators had an average of 10 hours to solve any of the 1,800 cases that crossed their desks last year.

The analysis - which factored in the number of cases per person, hours per day and time spent on leave - puts a number to a long-running sentiment for detectives and others, and the calculation sheds light on a little-scrutinized factor in dealing with sex crimes.

It comes at a time when Austin police have been criticized for how they handle such cases.

"Ten hours to work a sexual assault case - I can't think of a case where that is adequate time," said Austin Police Chief Brian Manley, who agreed that the Statesman's analysis is an appropriate measure. "I don't see a case where that would be sufficient."

MENTAL ILLNESS

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot: Thousands in mental health crisis are handcuffed by police. The state wants to cut that number.

At the Suffolk Police Department, it's not unheard of for an officer to spend eight hours driving to Staunton and back with a patient who's in the middle of a mental health crisis, handcuffed in the back of the cop car, headed for a psychiatric hospital on court orders.

The same can be said for police departments across Virginia, where thousands of people - at least 5,700 in Hampton Roads, according to the latest estimates - are taken into custody each year for such "involuntary commitments." Many are taken far away from their homes in search of a hospital bed and medical help, even though they usually haven't committed a crime.

State code says that's how authorities are to handle people who have a mental illness and could be deemed a threat to themselves or others.

"It's ineffective, it's costly; it's - for a lack of a better word - inhumane," said Dana Schrad, head of the Virginia Association of the Chiefs of Police, to a group of people who are figuring out ways to change the system of temporary detention orders, or TDOs.

In October, health officials began searching for a company that would be able to transport people who are subject to a TDO "in such a way as to decriminalizes (sic) the process and reduce stigma," according to a request for proposals.

Last week, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services awarded a $7 million, two-year contract to G4S Secure Solutions, which will take about half of the people under a TDO from where they're evaluated to wherever they will be temporarily hospitalized.

Gail Paysour is hoping the new transportation model will reduce instances in which issuing a TDO means criminalizing a mental illness.

The state hired Paysour to coordinate the alternative transportation project. She has experience working in community services boards and said she knows how difficult the process can be for everyone involved.

OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTINGS

Salt Lake Tribune: Police in Utah fatally shot a record 19 people in 2018. Now the state attorney general is investigating why.

People were killed in the streets. In vehicles. In homes. Unarmed, and as they held weapons, and as they held something - a cellphone, a toy gun - that officers thought were weapons. Some lunged toward police. Some told officers they wanted to die. Some had their backs turned.

In 2018, not a month went by without an officer in Utah shooting at someone. In all, police killed 19 people and shot at 30. That level of lethal force, according to Salt Lake Tribune records, was the highest in recent years.

Now the Utah attorney general's office has begun investigating why 2018 was so deadly.

Scott Carver, who is leading the project, will look into police shootings across the state in 2016, 2017 and 2018. He has requested files for all those cases and plans to interview the officers and investigators involved. So far, he's received documents from one county.

The question isn't the legality of each officer's use of force, Carver said - an assessment generally made by prosecutors in the county where a shooting occurs. Instead, Carver wants to examine how officers are trained and the policies and procedures their departments have for using lethal force, to see what changes, if any, should be made. He also wants to know the role mental health issues play in the increase, including distraught people who appear to be attempting "suicide by cop" - and whether "anti-law enforcement sentiment" is a factor, he said.

TECHNOLOGY

CNET: Police are using flawed data in facial recognition searches, study finds

Police across the country are making facial recognition searches even when there's barely anything to match it with.

A study from the Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology released Thursday looked at how police are using flawed data to run facial recognition searches, despite years of studies showing these matches aren't reliable.

That includes using artist sketches, editing images to add eyes and lips, and searching for doppelgangers.

Civil rights and privacy advocates have warned against government agencies and law enforcement using facial recognition, because there aren't any significant limits to how the technology can be used. On Tuesday, though, San Francisco became the first city to ban police use of facial recognition, and other cities are looking to do the same.

SEXUAL OFFENSES

Dallas Morning News: 'Beginning to see critical mass': Dallas police raid shows new push to investigate Catholic clergy abuses

When they showed up to Catholic diocese office doors with search warrants in hand Wednesday, the Dallas Police Department seemingly broke with tradition.
Except in rare occasions, priests in recent decades have avoided prosecution in Dallas and across the country for sexual abuse - even when criminal evidence came to light as a result of civil lawsuits.

Zach Hiner, executive director of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP, said he believes police and district attorneys have generally respected the wishes of local church leaders to handle their own dirty laundry.

But increasingly, law enforcement agencies across the country are no longer sitting on the sidelines. And they're not waiting for church higher-ups' cooperation - a change that has heartened victims' advocates and prompted cries of, *what took so long*?

The Dallas Police Department's Child Exploitation Unit last year assigned Detective David Clark, a 20-year veteran, to the full-time job of looking into cases of sex abuse involving minors within the local diocese.

After Clark felt stonewalled by the diocese and its lawyers for months - issues he detailed in a search-warrant affidavit - police officers and FBI agents seized files from the Dallas diocese Wednesday as part of the ongoing investigation into sex abuse allegations.

Law enforcement took files from the diocese's headquarters as well as from a storage site and St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Oak Cliff, where the priest who sparked the investigation previously served.

WOMEN IN POLICING

London Evening Standard: Met chief Cressida Dick: Terror attacks made police look too macho for women

The macho image of male police officers dealing with terrorist attacks and the Grenfell Tower disaster could be putting off women from joining the Met, Scotland Yard chief Cressida Dick said today.

She said the terror attacks in London in 2017, when mainly male firearms officers were deployed on the streets, and the Grenfell fire in the same year had led to a mistaken view of policing as a "very physical service".

Ms Dick told the Standard: "People have got it into their heads that you have to be supremely fit or strong when actually the vast majority of our officers, most of the time, are not using huge amounts of physical strength to get the job done. They are using their communication skills, their problem-solving skills and their analytical skills."

The Met commissioner said more had to be done to challenge the "stereotypes and myths" of

policing as a macho culture.

Her comments came as she attended a service of thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey today to mark 100 years of women police officers in the Met.

OFFICER WELLNESS

Boston 25 News: Commissioner Gross: Mental health support for police officers is vital

Boston Police Commissioner William Gross is making it clear that the need for mental health support for police officers in our state is vital.

Gross attended a breakfast Friday morning and spoke in front of a room full of supporters about the equipment, training, and technology, but then, a dose of reality that many don't talk about.

"A lot of people don't know that officers are facing tough times," said Gross.

Gross pointed to what Boston 25 News has reported on for months, that more officers die from taking their own lives than in the line of duty.

USE OF FORCE

Cambridge (MA) Patch: Cambridge Police cleared of brutality after punching student

The former chief justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts tasked with reviewing the arrest of a black Harvard undergraduate in 2018 said he does not think police did anything wrong. The arrest of a then-18-year-old student who was standing naked in the middle of Mass Avenue sparked allegations of police brutality after a passerby captured officers on video punching the student.

The altercation between the student and police was filmed by passersby and posted to YouTube in April. It shows that before the student's arrest, the undergrad appeared to be standing naked in the middle of the median along Mass. Ave for some time as police stood in a circle around him. At one point the student steps forward and an officer tackles the student. The student starts screaming a high pitch scream. Bystanders yell at the police who are seen punching the man, that they don't need to do that to him.

ICAT

Eureka Police Department: Local law enforcement agencies take multi-day course on defusing critical incidents

On May 14th and 15th, 2019, local law enforcement agencies participated in a one-and-half-day train-the-trainer course for defusing critical incidents which was hosted by the Eureka Police Department.

The course of instruction, ICAT (Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics), is a new and innovative approach to de-escalation and use-of-force training. ICAT provides first responding law enforcement officers with the tools, skills, and options they need to successfully defuse a range of critical incidents.

POLICE EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS

Bethesda (MD) Magazine: Montgomery's interim police chief stepping down

Weeks after he was appointed Montgomery County's acting police chief, Russell Hamill will leave the department in June to lead Laurel's police force.

Hamill, a lifelong county resident who has a law degree from Howard University, has been with the department since 1986, and has served as assistant chief since September 2011.

Hamill was named interim chief of the 1,300-officer force in April following the retirement of J. Thomas Manger.

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